

Red, Black and Blue by frankenstina

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Ambiguous/Open Ending, Angst, Bisexual Billy Hargrove, Canon Compliant, F/M, Gen, Implied/Referenced Child Abuse, M/M, Post-Battle of Starcourt (Stranger Things), Post-Canon, Post-Season/Series 03, Racism, Sibling Bonding, The Upside Down, Wakes & Funerals, blink and you'll miss the harringrove, jfc all the sibling tags are incestuous, max reminisces about billy a lot, no beta we die like that one scientist guy from the first episode, rest assured it's there

Language: English

Characters: Billy Hargrove, Eleven | Jane Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Joyce Byers, Lucas Sinclair, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Neil Hargrove, Steve Harrington, Susan Hargrove

Relationships: Billy Hargrove & Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Billy Hargrove/Steve Harrington, Maxine "Max" Mayfield/Lucas Sinclair

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Summary:

Heroes always get remembered, but you know legends never die.

Red, Black and Blue

Author's Note:

- listen,,, s3 forced my hand. I am not to blame for this Atrocity.

She'd taken the photo in some empty parking lot in downtown LA, sunlight two years younger glinting off the hood of the Camaro. Billy's moustache was still a couple of stray gold whiskers on his upper lip; his hair just past the tips of his unpierced ears. A different Billy to the one Hawkins had seen, but post-California Billy hadn't had much time for Max's amateur attempts at photography. Or for Max, in general.

"It's a good photo."

Jonathan Byers was not a formal wear kind of guy. He looked stiff and uncomfortable in his ugly suit- or maybe that was just an extension of how he was feeling. How they all were.

Max wrapped her hands around her elbows, suddenly regretting resisting her mother's attempts to usher her into a jacket. "Thanks. I know he looks- different."

Jonathan looked for a moment like he might offer her his ugly coat; then he probably remembered the uglier shirt he wore underneath. "He looks happier."

"He was." Max dug her nails into her skin. "He hated it here."

Jonathan shoved his hands into his pockets. "Listen, Max; I know it's not- it's not really the same, but when I- when I thought Will was gone, I-" He swallowed. "Will is my best friend. I know that sounds really lame, but I just thought that. Maybe you'd feel better, or, I dunno. I know what it's like."

He was trying so hard. Max almost felt bad for him. "I don't think you do."

She'd wanted to sit next to Lucas, but her mom hadn't. Some

murmured nonsense about Neil not liking it; some louder nonsense about how they were a family and that now, more than ever, they had to stay together.

El became the compromise.

Not that Neil was gung-ho about El, either; not with the oversized flannel and suspenders she'd refused to change out of. Light blue eyes bore a hole into the side of Max's head as she shuffled into the pew next to El. They weren't the same shade of blue as Billy's; he'd had more green to his, more like Max's own. Neil's were like ice chips.

A bony hand reached over, and Max looked up at Joyce Byers's warm brown instead. "I'm sorry, sweetie," she whispered.

Stupidly, Max said, "He owed you a plate."

El stirred. "I owe him my life," she said quietly.

The last funeral Max had been to had been for some distant Mayfield relative. She'd been six and she'd cried all the way to Glendale because she was missing *Jabberjaw*. Then Dad bought her an ice cream and she'd forgotten all about *Jabberjaw*. She fell asleep halfway through the service, and they got home in time for *Speed Buggy*.

Billy's service took half as long and felt an eternity longer.

Mom had offered to do a eulogy. She'd brought it up over breakfast, nervous eyes darting between Max and Neil, as if either of them would put up a fight. She tottered to her feet now, shuffling awkwardly to the front, in a dress a few laundry cycles short of being grey. For a fleeting moment, Max wished she had put up a fight. Billy would've *died*-

Max bit her cheek hard enough to taste copper.

Mom cleared her throat. "Billy and I didn't know each other for very long, but I wish we had. He was a wonderful young man." She dabbed at her eyes with a ratty handkerchief.

Max sank back into her seat. Maybe it was for the best; she could never lie about Billy the way her mom did. Not when all she could

think of was the blood- God, so much blood, *his* blood- his last scream torn out of his chest by misshapen claws- apologies on a dying breath-

She stood up. Mom paused midway between some crap about Billy's 'respect and responsibility'.

"Maxine," Mom said, mortified.

"I have to go." She tore outside, knuckling her burning eyes.

The breeze nipped at her skin. She leaned against the wall, rubbing her hands up her arms. It was mid-July, for Pete's sake.

She should've worn the stupid jacket.

She wiped at her face roughly. When her vision cleared, Lucas stood in front of her.

"Your mom's done talking, if you wanna head back inside." He kicked at a pebble.

Max kicked it back. It skittered away, just out of Lucas's reach. "Not really."

He squared his shoulders. "Mind if I join you, then?"

She shrugged. He hesitated for a moment before sidling up next to her, arms barely brushing.

"Steve's giving his speech now."

Max's eyebrows reached her scalp.

"For the basketball team," Lucas clarified, then added, a little awkwardly, "None of the other guys showed up."

It shouldn't hurt, but. "Yeah, well. Didn't think Steve would, either. He hated Billy's guts." She dug her heels into the gravel. "You all did."

Lucas fell quiet. "I didn't hate him."

Max snorted. “’Cause you’re not supposed to hold grudges over people who are-” She blinked back a fresh wave of tears. *God, Maxine; you’re such a goddamn girl*, Billy would’ve said. “You should. He was awful to you.”

“I didn’t hate him,” he repeated. “I mean, he scared the shit out of me, sure. But still. He was your brother.”

“That’s not an excuse. And he was my step-”

“*He was your brother.*” Lucas had turned on his side, fully facing her now. “And I know you lo- cared about him. And I’m trying to tell you that it’s okay to cry.”

Her eyes welled with tears. She hadn’t allowed herself to; not since Starcourt, not since she’d read the twenty-eight other names in the paper, not since she’d come home in an ambulance and her brother in a casket and Neil locked up Billy’s room and tore down everything else that had belonged to his son and threw it all in the trash like he’d been waiting to get rid of it-

Lucas held out an arm. Max buried her face in his chest, clutching the fabric of his shirt and turning it translucent with her tears.

She cried long enough for her tear ducts to run dry, and then stood sniffing into the wet shirt. She was probably making it all gross with her snot, but she didn’t let herself get too torn up about it. The Sinclairs could afford a washing machine.

“Maxine.”

Max went rigid. Lucas, unbothered and oblivious, kept his arms around her. “Hey, Mr. Hargrove.”

She turned around slowly, just in time to catch the flicker of revulsion that passed over Neil’s face. “And who are you, boy?”

There was a painful pause. Max’s nails carved crescents into her palms.

“Lucas Sinclair, sir,” Lucas said at last.

Neil's eyes were glacial. Max barely suppressed a shiver when they trained on her. "Maxine; something you learn when you grow older that there are a certain type of people in this world that you stay away from. And this boy?" Neil cut his gaze to Lucas. "This boy is one of them."

Max reeled back. "I-"

"You stay away from my daughter, Sinclair; do you hear me?" Neil hadn't raised his voice once since he'd started speaking. To any passers-by, this would look like a normal conversation. "*Stay away.*"

He didn't wait for Lucas to respond, tugging Max away with a harsh grip on her wrist. She didn't dare to turn around.

"I don't want you anywhere near that boy, Maxine." His hold loosened the closer they got to the car- Neil's car, a respectable Ford sedan. She didn't dare tug her hand free, either. "I hope you learn your lesson with this. Billy didn't; not at first. I'm afraid I had to use more- forceful- methods with him. I trust I won't have to do the same with you."

Max turned to Neil despite herself. It was the first time he'd said Billy's name since the Fourth of July.

His eyes gave nothing away. "Do I make myself clear?" His fingers tightened again.

"Yes, Papa."

"Good." Neil's smile was a mirror of Billy's; shark-like and vicious, moments away from tearing into your throat. "It's about time you got some new friends, too. Girls your age shouldn't be hanging around with boys too much."

"El's a girl," Max told her shoes.

Neil scoffed. "Really? Did she show you proof?"

What happened to you, Mad Max? Billy would've asked. You're not going to stand up for your little hick friends?

Or maybe-

I had to use more forceful methods with him - the bruises she'd see on Billy while his own knuckles remained unscathed- Mom whisking her away on impromptu shopping trips whenever Neil and Billy raised their voices- *forceful methods* -

- maybe he would understand.

★★★

Billy's life couldn't have fit into a garbage bag.

Max hadn't gone into his room since she'd gone with El, but he had to have more than what Neil had thrown out onto the sidewalk. Outside the four walls of his room, it was like Billy hadn't even existed.

She slipped out of bed in the quiet.

Billy had taught her how to pick a lock, back in California. *"Use a hairpin, or somethin'- you got one of those?"*

She unfurled her fingers. The hairpin was damp with sweat. She wiped it on her t-shirt, and slid it into the keyhole.

"Keep your big ears close to the door; you won't hear squat that far away."

She held her breath, pressing her ear to the cool wood.

"Wait for the sound- there, you hear that? That's how you know the tumblers are in place."

The door swung open with a soft *click*.

Max half expected to be assaulted by cigarette smoke and hair metal. But it had been almost a week, and all that Billy had left behind were stale air and silence.

She flicked on the flashlight. The blinds were drawn, the bed unmade, half his closet on the floor. Air the room out, and you could pretend he'd walk right in.

His schoolbooks balanced an ashtray; the desk was not for studying. Instead, he'd cluttered it with beer cans and tapes and a tree's worth of loose-leaf.

She padded over and sat down in his chair, trying to imagine him hunched over the desk, scribbling on page after page in messy letters. Billy's handwriting was just as angry as he was.

Her eyes flickered over song lyrics- snippets from the racket she'd been forced to sit through every weekday morning and afternoon. Somehow, silent car rides had lost their appeal.

Strange little doodles decorated the margins- band logos and cars and anatomically inaccurate depictions of women. "Gross," Max said aloud, pushing the papers away with a theatric shudder.

The tabletop had not been exempted from Billy's artistry; Max shone the flashlight on more band logos and cuss words and names engraved into the wood. Here there was a crude AC/DC logo, the lightning slash extending down to form the 't' in 'TWAT'. There was a 'María' right next to that, the accent mark angled in the wrong direction. Max remembered her; she'd gone out with Billy for all of sophomore year- the longest Max had ever seen him go out with one girl. She'd taught Max how to do makeup.

A few paces away was *Tina*- the prettiest girl in Hawkins High, everyone agreed- *Laurie* was a slut, but she'd complimented Max on her hair- and then *Karen*. Max traced the 'K'; she didn't know any Karens who went to Hawkins High- but then again, she barely knew all the kids in the middle school. There could be a pretty blonde cheerleader somewhere, talking to her friends over the phone. "*Yeah, I went out with him a couple of times,*" Max imagined her saying. She'd twirl a strand of hair around her finger, lips pulled down in a pout. "*And now he's dead. Spooky.*"

She knuckled her eyes. The beam of the flashlight caught on the letter S.

She held the flashlight up, frowning at the name that made itself obvious. *Stevie*- except the 'i' was jammed haphazardly between the 'v' and the 'e', like it had been an afterthought.

She stared at it until the light flickered overhead.

"Shit!"

Max dropped the flashlight, head snapping back to the door. It hung ajar, just as she'd left it. Heart in her throat, she inched towards the doorway.

The hallway light flicked on.

Max held the flashlight close to her chest, knuckles bone-white and stark. She stepped outside, and the light turned on in the living room.

When she stood in the doorway, staring out at the lifeless room, the telephone started to ring.

Her feet felt heavy as cinderblocks. She plucked the receiver from its cradle, bringing it to her ear with shaking hands.

From the other side, someone breathed heavily.

Max pressed the phone closer, hard enough to hurt. "Billy?"

A crackle of static. Some peculiar noise.

Apologies on a dying breath.

Then, "Max."

Author's Note:

- one of my Fondest Childhood Memories is going to see *Shark Tales* with my parents and breaking down when we got Home because I missed my Cartoons
- also because *Shark Tales* sucked and I wanted to see *Finding Nemo*
- Max is allowed to trash Jon's clothing because her brother is Billy fuckin' Hargrove sorry I don't make

the Rules

- I have only ever been to Catholic church also I do Not know what people do in Church because I am a Heathen and I cannot be bothered to do Research yeee
- (that is a Lie I actually did research in the form of a *Pretty Little Liars* episode so I hope you're Happy)
- I also had to keep Cussing to a Minimum because Max is, to her great misfortune, a Child. do u know the sheer amount of fucks I had to unfuck. do u.
- many and assorted thanks for reading!
- I bring dishonor to myself on [Twitter](#). I bring dishonor to myself, my family and my cow on [Tumblr](#).